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UNCLAS FRANKFURT 002973

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [PINR](#) [GM](#)

SUBJECT: Torch Passing in Conservative Bastion: Baden-Wuerttemberg Minister-President Designate Oettinger

REF: 04 Frankfurt 10621 (lists previous reftels)

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[11.](#) (SBU) SUMMARY: On April 21, Baden-Wuerttemberg CDU (Christian Democratic) caucus chief Guenther Oettinger will succeed Erwin Teufel as Minister-President. Oettinger, a lawyer and business expert, will likely retain Teufel's cabinet through state elections in March 2006. Observers expect Oettinger to infuse the party with new ideas and energy and to extend its dominance in next year's state elections. END SUMMARY.

[12.](#) (SBU) For decades, the CDU has held power (alone or in coalition) in Baden-Wuerttemberg (B-W), one of Germany's economic centers (as home to Daimler-Chrysler and other leading industrial groups). In December 2004, Oettinger won the right to succeed Teufel in an unprecedented, non-binding CDU membership referendum (by twenty points over State Education Minister Annette Schavan). He was formally named standard-bearer for the 2006 state elections at a special CDU convention (with a convincing 94.7% of the vote). Oettinger's ascent had been widely expected: since becoming CDU caucus chairman in 1991, Oettinger had laid the basis to succeed M-P Teufel. Two years ago, he privately emphasized to us the importance of Teufel making way for a new CDU minister-president prior to state elections in 2006.

[13.](#) (SBU) Insiders see Oettinger as an astute and ambitious politician but not always a charismatic speaker. Oettinger is a political survivor who outlasted Teufel's antagonism over the past decade. When M-P Teufel failed to get a majority on the first parliamentary ballot in 1996, he accused Oettinger of plotting against him, an accusation Teufel repeated over the years. Teufel made no secret of his preference for Schavan over Oettinger (reftel).

[14.](#) (SBU) Oettinger belongs to the liberal wing of the CDU and gained nationwide recognition early in his political career. As chairman of the state Junge Union (Young Conservatives) from 1983 to 1989, Oettinger publicly declared in 1988 that then-Chancellor Kohl's best days had passed and suggested that Kohl step down. Oettinger was first elected to the B-W State Parliament in 1984. In 2001, he became chairman of the influential North-Wuerttemberg chapter of the B-W CDU (on April 29, Oettinger will also assume the position of B-W CDU state chairman). Oettinger is a tactician rather than an ideologue; as early as 1992, he suggested that the CDU could go into coalition with the B-W Greens under the right conditions. Privately, Oettinger emphasizes that the CDU is a "people's party" that must consider the effects of economic reform on average Germans.

[15.](#) (SBU) Oettinger was born in Stuttgart on October 15, [1953](#). He is married to Inken Oettinger (nee Stange), a fashion designer. The couple have one son. He plays piano and guitar and enjoys attending rock concerts. Oettinger is a former IV recipient whose three-week stay in the U.S. during his time as Junge Union chairman left a deep impression on him, shaping his view of the U.S. in very positive ways. He speaks good English (albeit with a pronounced Swabian accent).

[16.](#) (SBU) COMMENT: Oettinger's top priority for the next twelve months will be winning the March 2006 state elections with an absolute majority if possible (the CDU's state coalition partner, the FDP, is mired in scandals). Political insiders expect Oettinger to be more active on the national level (i.e. in the Bundesrat) and to try to increase the CDU's appeal to urban constituents who now vote largely Green or Social Democratic. Oettinger likely will place one or two confidants in key positions but keep most of the current cabinet through next year's elections. Supporters claim that Oettinger will reenergize politics and borrow ideas from various political parties (not just his own) to tackle the state's long-term economic, demographic, and fiscal problems. END COMMENT.

BODDE